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ABSTRACT

The implications of the Education for All Handicapped Children's Act are discussed as they affect the physical education teacher and the school administrator. The reasons for the enactment of Public Law 94-142 are outlined with specific emphasis on the need for physical activity for the handicapped. Concerns voiced by administrators and teachers as well as parents and the community are illustrated and discussed. Finally, recommendations are made for successful implementation of physical education programs for the handicapped. (JD)

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EDUCATION FOR ALL HANDICAPPED CHILDREN: RATIONALE, CONCERNS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

In November, 1975, President Gerald R. Ford signed a legislative bill that has, and will have, a profound impact on the quality of physical education programs for handicapped children. The landmark legislation is referred to as "Education for All Handicapped Children's Act," or "Public Law 94-142."

Generally, the law mandates that, as of 1980, all handicapped individuals, ages 3-21, will be provided educational programs designed to meet their needs. Specifically, the "meeting of needs" is interpreted as:

1. Conducting a "needs assessment" which includes:
   - . establishing realistic goals for each learner
   - . testing each learner to determine the extent to which he/she has attained those goals
   - . identifying the "gaps" between the goals established and learner levels (the "gaps" are the identified "needs")
2. Planning and initiating an Individualized Educational Program (I.E.P.) which includes:
   - . establishing long range goals for each learner
   - . designing and implementing a series of short range objectives (i.e., measurable activities which reflect degrees of attainment of each goal)
3. Evaluating learner progress at least once annually.
4. Placing each learner in the "least restrictive environment" (i.e., in an instructional setting designed to meet his/her educational needs.
5. Keeping parents advised at periodic intervals as to the progress of the learner.

During the 1976-77 school year, school districts throughout the country were required to conduct and submit "needs assessment" information to their state officials. As of September, 1977, all teachers of the handicapped are mandated to initiate an I.E for each handicapped child in their charge. The mandate is extremely significant because the legislation specifically identified physical education as an integral part of each handicapped child's educational program. Thus, each physical educator must be aware of, and involved in, the planning and implementation of each child's I.E.P., regardless of the student population he/she is presently teaching, because of the legislative mandate that each child be placed in the "least restrictive environment." (It is assumed that proper pupil placement will find many handicapped children "mainstreamed," that is, scheduled in the unrestricted physical education program.)

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To ensure immediate and appropriate compliance with the Act, the federal law has a "check and balance" system - parental involvement in every step of the process. Parent involvement, cited as "due process," requires that parents must be involved in:

1. The determination of the child"s classification.
2. The preparation and implementation of his/her I.E.P.
3. The evaluation process.
4. The placement of the child in a specific educational setting.

Succintly stated, P.L.94-142 requires: each learner be provided an I.E.P.; his/her progress be noted and reported periodically; and parents be maximally involved. This article addresses why the law was enacted, some of the author's concerns and recommendations that will aid us in complying with the law.

REASONS FOR ENACTMENT OF PUBLIC LAW 94-142

The enactment of the Education For All Handicapped Children's Act arose from a general concern that handicapped children were not being provided educational opportunities commensurate with that of their peer groups. Some of the specific concerns addressed such questions as:

- were on-going teaching and learning strategies and activities truly meeting the needs of handicapped children?
- were administrators identifying and programming those learners with serious handicapping conditions?
- was the educational community preparing the handicapped population to become productive members of our society?
- will existing grouping procedures result in the optimal physical, mental, social and emotional growth of the children involved?
- were parents involved in their children's educational programs?

Surveys, conferences, research and parental interviews revealed, with a few exceptions that the concerns cited, and others, were legitimate, and that a need existed to identify and institute educational programs that were based on accountability, relevancy and parental involvement.

P.L. 94-142 specifically included physical education instruction for two reasons:

1. A general awareness of the values to be derived from sound physical activity programming, (e.g. the enhancement of the child's self-concept and the development of physical skills necessary for job placement).
2. Cognizance of the fact that existing legislation (mostly implicit) has not resulte in the institution of physical education programs for the handicapped.

CONCERNS

As Director of Project ACTIVE, the author has corresponded with, visited, and observed physical education programs for the handicapped in twenty states during the past three years. This involvement has generated the following concerns:

Past History and Current Practices

In the past we as physical educators have been notorious for our lack of involvement in physical activity programming for the handicapped. A true story illustrates the concern. A graduate student in a course taught by the author decided to borrow a balance beam from the Psychology Department so that he could demonstrate one of the current motor programs. The retort from a member of the Department was "Does the Physical Education Department want to get involved in our program?" While we have made some advances in recent years, psychologists and special educators continue to provide the major impetus for physical activity programs for the handicapped. This statement is not intended to demean either the psychologist or the special educator; on the contrary, they are to be commended for the leadership they have provided.

Lack of Administrative Leadership

How can we as a profession provide the vital services mandated when many school districts, and some states, do not currently provide physical education programs for students in the elementary grades? (Physical education is defined as a physical activity program taught by a certified and qualified physical educator.) The onus for this grievous omission must fall on the shoulders of today's administrators, whose order of educational priorities, too frequently, does not include physical education.

Lack of Involvement With Students, Parents, School Boards and Community

Major thrusts on the educational scene include austerity, accountability and parental involvement. As educators we have been seriously remiss because we have not conducted a constant all-encompassing public relations campaign. (Most of our P.R. strategies relate to our athletic programs.) In essence, although we are endeavoring to establish exemplary programs, we have not involved in the process students, parents, teachers, administrators, school boards and the communities-at-large. Consequently, adapted physical education programs are being accorded a low priority and are being dropped by many districts.

Another true story which highlights the significance of sound public relations: In New Jersey, budget appropriations for the 1977-78 school year were generally finalized as of January-February, 1977. In one school district, the Board of Education had reduced the budget for adapted physical education by 50 percent. During the interim the Director of Special Services and Adapted P.E. Coordinator prepared a video tape of their program and charts which depicted pupil performance gains. They requested and gave a 20-minute presentation to the Board of Education in June, 1977;

the outcome: the budget cut was restored. More important, however, the Board was made aware of a program that was benefitting their student population.

General Reticence of Physical Educators to Get Involved

Education is "all about" children. Without children, there is no need for teachers, administrators and other support services. A concerned, competent teacher is the most critical ingredient in the teaching-learning process. This is the writer's major concern - the general reticence of physical educators to teach our special children (particularly at the secondary level). As physical educators, most of us are certified to teach physical education in grades K-12; this certification does not exclude the handicapped child.

Limited Leadership Provided by State Educational Agencies

A review of the personnel employed by state educational agencies indicates that several states do not have a Director or Supervisor of Health, Physical Education and Recreation. In those states, to whom can one go for assistance in interpreting P.L.94-142 and other state and federal mandates?

A related concern is the lack of "plans of action" by all state departments of education, a plan that is jointly conceived and implemented by the Departments of Physical Education and Special Education.
(Note: The key word is "all." Several states have been providing the needed leadership since the legislative enactment and will soon develop alternative models which will serve as guidelines for their local school districts.)

The Need for Expanded Program Offering by Institutions of Higher Learning

While some colleges and universities have been providing exemplary leadership in Adapted Physical Education and Therapeutic Recreation, most degree programs that generally exist throughout the nation provide little more than exposure to one course offering at the preservice level. Consequently, the concern is that thousands of practitioners in the field do not possess those skills, strategies and attitudes necessary to implement effectively P.L.94-142.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The problems are many and the time is short, but we can ensure that each handicapped child will receive an equal education if we as professionals band together and work toward the unified goal. Immediate implementation of the recommendations herewith presented should enhance goal attainment.

1. All physical education teachers be required to register for inservice training until they possess those minimal skills, strategies and attitudes necessary

to implement a physical education program for a child with any handicapping condition.

Rationale: The mainstreaming of handicapped students requires teachers who are sensitive to the needs of, and can provide programs for, handicapped children.

2. The Health and Physical Education Departments (HPE) at the local level establish a close working relationship with the Special and Health Services Departments.

   Rationale: There is a direct relation between the degree of program success and the involvement and support of "key" personnel.

3. The HPE Departments conduct needs assessments, formulate and institute programs, develop curricula, and maintain on-going public relations campaigns directed towards students, teachers, parents, administrators, boards of education and the communities-at-large.

   Rationale: The best of intentions will go for naught, unless the efforts are conveyed to all concerned.

4. Administrators be kept posted and be "actively" involved in all aspects of the program.

   Rationale: Program success is virtually unattainable without administrative support.

   Strategy: A monthly newsletter highlighting the benefits derived would help to "bridge the gap."

5. A massive, on-going public relations campaign be conducted at the local level, for the purpose of actively involving the school-community in the program.

   Rationale: The constant, positive dissemination of educational values derived will not only deter program erosion but also enhance program expansion.

   Strategy: An Adapted P.E. Advisory Council is one excellent P.R. strategy

6. State AHPER Associations, EDA-AAHPER and AAHPER "spearhead" drives to ensure that every state has an Office of HPER in the State Department of Education and that physical education programs are mandated for all children in grades K-12.

   Rationale: Increasing legislative mandates requires the provision of assistance by State Departments of Education.

7. A "master plan" for complying with P.L. 94-142 be jointly sponsored and developed by the State Directors of HPE and Special Education in each state.

   Rationale: The "marriage" of departments will enhance the success of the effort.

8. Institutions of higher learning conduct their own "needs assessments" and reshape their curricula offerings accordingly. Priority considerations include:

- The retooling of staff members
- The conducting of inservice programs that are designed to remediate immediate local needs
- The design and implementation of degree programs to meet the long range needs of local educational agencies
- The development of "continuing education programs" so that teacher needs can be updated as societal emphases change.
- The development of interdepartmental curricula offerings (physical education, special education, psychology, etc.) to provide for the meeting of the needs of the "total child."

Rationale: The current emphasis in education is to design school curricula to meet the needs of each learner - a change in philosophy from the former content oriented approach.

SUMMARY

The Physical Education profession is being required to expand its program offerings to include all handicapped children at a time when the austerity trend is reducing the numbers of teachers in the field. We have two alternatives.

1. We can "throw up our arms" and indicate the task cannot be accomplished.
2. Or, we can "grasp" at the challenge, establish exemplary programs throughout the land and use the propitious opportunity to create an awareness of the need for a vibrant physical education program for all children.

My vote is that we chose the latter alternative.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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